

INTERVIEW WITH DR. HARVEY NELSON
BY DOROTHE NORTON SEPTEMBER 5, 2002

MS. NORTON: This is Thursday, September 5, 2002. And this recording will be of Harvey K. Nelson, formerly Director of Region 3 and a very, very good interview. Thank you. Good morning Harvey! I want to thank you for being able to find some time in your busy schedule so we could do this interview.

DR. NELSON: It's good to see you Dorothe.

MS. NORTON: The first thing I'd like to know is your birthplace and date.

DR. NELSON: I was born in Barrett, Minnesota in the western part of the State January 29, 1925.

MS. NORTON: And your parent's names?

DR. NELSON: My parents were Johnny and Selma Nelson.

MS. NORTON: What kind of education and jobs did they have?

DR. NELSON: My father was a farmer in that part of the state. We moved around a bit during the drought years. He also worked for the Great Northern Railroad. We wound up living in Evansville, Minnesota. That's the community that I grew up in really, and graduated from High School there.

MS. NORTON: Did your folks have any education through High School?

DR. NELSON: They went through elementary school and into high school. Back in those years, there wasn't much other place to go unless you went on to a large city.

MS. NORTON: How did you spend your early years? What hobbies, books, or events interested you?

DR. NELSON: Well, I grew up in the country; I think until I was probably about twelve years old. That was during the drought period so I grew up in some tough times. But I think during that period, it also gave me a good exposure to the rural living and the outdoors. My father was a hunter and I got exposed early on to duck hunting and pheasant hunting and that type of thing. It also exposed me to the hardships or the tough times people went through back in the late 1920's and early 1930's on into the early 1940's really. So that gave me an appreciation in the long term for the land and how it needed to be treated. Those kinds of things became important to me later in life as I got into the Fish and Wildlife programs.

MS. NORTON: That's good. So you hunted, did you ever fish too?

DR. NELSON: Oh sure! Sometimes, fish and pheasants were part of our weekly and monthly diet.

MS. NORTON: You said you graduated from High School in Evansville, Minnesota?

DR. NELSON: Yes, Evansville, Minnesota.

MS. NORTON: What year was that?

DR. NELSON: 1941.

MS. NORTON: Okay. And what university did you attend?

DR. NELSON: Well, I went to the University of Minnesota first, but I did that after returning from World War II. In 1941 and early 1942, I came to the Twin Cities and I started to explore what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a Veterinarian because I worked with some people in my hometown who had encouraged me to do that. So I took some courses over at the University before I went into the Service. I spent three years or a little more in the Navy in World War II down in the South Pacific. Then when I came back I enrolled full time at the University and did my undergraduate work there. I also spent a year in Graduate School there. In 19.... Let's see, Jean and I were married in 1947. And of course she worked and I was at the University. Then when I got my undergraduate degree and stayed on at Graduate School, I began to look for employment of some kind. I had worked part time for the then Minnesota Department of Conservation. So I knew a lot of people up in the Minnesota DNR, as it's now called. I had an opportunity to go to work full time there. But at the same time, I had applied for jobs in the federal service and I was interested in working for the Fish and Wildlife Service because of the interest I had in migratory birds and waterfowl in general and wetlands, and the rural areas and all of that type of thing. I knew a little bit about the Service. I had met some Service people while I was still in Graduate School; people like Art Hawkins and others who worked here in the Regional Office at that time. So I really wanted to go to work for the Service and all of a sudden in the spring of 1950 I had job opportunities with the Minnesota Department of Conservation and also with the Fish and Wildlife Service. I had two possibilities with the Service; one was to go to Alaska and work with the new Federal Aid program they were opening there. Jean wasn't too keen on that. The other was to go to South Dakota and work with the Refuge Program and the Small Wetland Program that Ken Black and Chuck Evans were just beginning in the Waubay Study area, that year. So it was an easy decision for us; we decided to go to South Dakota. We lived at Sand Lake Refuge for two, almost three years. And I worked seasonally with Black

and Evans at the Waubay Study area in the beginning of the wetland program. The rest of the year, I was at the Refuge.

MS. NORTON: What degree did you get at the University?

DR. NELSON: I got a BS in Fish and Wildlife Management with a minor in Chemistry from the University of Minnesota. And then as I worked with the Service and moved around, I finished my Master's Degree at Michigan State when I worked in Michigan. I did that in Resource Conservation. Then, later on, I received some scholarships from the Service in some of the Departmental Management Training Programs and all that at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. I spent two sessions there at GWU and did graduate work in Public Administration. Then, much later in my life, while I was at the Research Center, the Northern Prairie Research Center in North Dakota, I served on the graduate faculty at North Dakota State University and spend quite a bit of time there, in their graduate program and I took a lot of addition courses there working on my Ph.D. Then I moved from North Dakota before I completed that. But later, they awarded me a Doctor of Science degree from North Dakota State University. So that's sort of a conglomeration of education over the years.

MS. NORTON: Wow! I always knew you were pretty smart! And so, you were in the Navy? What duty stations did you have other than overseas? Did you get your basic training at Great Lakes?

DR. NELSON: We all started our training at Great Lakes and then I moved to the east coast. I got assigned to some landing detachments that were assigned to other organizations like the Marine Corp and the Sea-Bee Battalions. Then we went to California. This would have been in 1942 and early 1943. I was assigned to the 109 Sea-Bee Battalion and the 4th Marine Division. They were getting ready for the Central Pacific operations at that point. Part of that group began in the Gilbert Islands and then the group I was assigned to spent several months in the Marshall Island campaign when that was underway. Then we'd go back to the Hawaiian Island and kind of regroup and get ready for the next move, because things were starting to move pretty fast at that point. I spent some time with the invasion of Guam, and then back to Hawaii again. I was injured in the Marshall Island campaign, so when I got back to Hawaii after being on Guam and getting ready to go to Okinawa and such places, they decided I had spent enough time out there so they sent me back to a Naval Hospital in Hawaii and then back to Oakland. Then, towards the end of the War, in November of 1945, I was discharged and went home.

MS. NORTON: Did you get any decorations from the Navy?

DR. NELSON: Oh, I had the normal things that they give, plus a Purple Heart for disabilities and all of that type of thing.

MS. NORTON: Oh, wonderful! Okay.

DR. NELSON: But I was pretty young when I went in the Navy. I was about seventeen. I wasn't quite eighteen when I entered. So that was kind of a new experience for a young farm boy. But it was a good experience other than the injuries and things. That's where I lost my hearing in my left ear. As you probably know, I've never heard anything out of that since February of 1944.

MS. NORTON: I never ever noticed that Harvey, when you were Regional Director.

DR. NELSON: Is that right?

MS. NORTON: I never noticed that. You always seemed very alert!

DR. NELSON: I learned how to handle it.

MS. NORTON: Can you tell me when, where and how you and Jean met?

DR. NELSON: Well, when I came back to the Twin Cities after being in the Service, I started back at the University, I lived for a time with my Aunt and Uncle that were here then. Jean, her family of course, were in the resort business in northern Minnesota. Then during the War years her mother and father worked down here for the remainder of the year other than when they went back to open up their camp during those years. So she finished high school down here. They were from Hackensack, Minnesota and had their resort on Woman Lake near there. We still have a place. But when they were involved with this transition back and forth, she stayed down here and she graduated from Roosevelt High School. In the process, she became acquainted with my cousin in the family that I lived with. So that's how I met her, through my cousin.

MS. NORTON: Well that was very nice. Where and when did you get married?

DR. NELSON: We were married in Hackensack, Minnesota on September 13, 1947.

MS. NORTON: How many children?

DR. NELSON: We have a family of four. They are all grown children of course, at this point.

MS. NORTON: Can you tell me their names, and what they are doing now?

DR. NELSON: Our oldest boy, Steve is in his forties. Of course they all moved around the country with us as we went from job to job with the Service. He presently lives in

Fredericksburg, VA and is in business with another person. It's a floor covering business that they have. Then Beth, our oldest daughter she lives here in Barnesville. She has a son, our grandson who is twenty years old now, going on twenty-one. He's in college. Then we had twin daughter, Pat and Pam. We adopted those two. They are in their late thirties at this point. Pat is unmarried. She lives at home here. Then Pam is married and lives in Eagan. In their family, they have two children. So in a sense, we have the girls all around us and our son is still back on the east coast. When we moved back to Minneapolis in 1979 from Washington, D.C. and the Virginia area he stayed there. He comes back to visit. That's how he ended up there.

MS. NORTON: I have a granddaughter that's going to twenty-one in January. Maybe I ought to introduce her to your grandson! She's in her third year. But she's going to school out in Morris. But that's okay. Now, Harvey, we're going to get into your career. Why did you want to work for the Service? You kind of told me that because you said you were interested in conservation and animals.

DR. NELSON: Well, based on my experience as a young lad growing up in rural western Minnesota, I had a lot of exposure to hunting and fishing. I learned how to shoot Canvasbacks on the famous Christina Lake and at all of those places. My dad was a friend of another person that had a place there. I still go hunting there with the same family. So I had those kinds of interests. I also recognized that during the drought period I could see what happened when the countryside just dried up and we lost the potholes and the lakes just dried up. I kind of learned what happened to the fish and wildlife that were associated with these areas. I really felt that maybe that was an area that people could do something about. I was interested in getting into that kind of work. As I mentioned to you earlier, I originally set out to go to the school of veterinary medicine. But then I found out that they didn't have a complete Vet School at Minnesota. You had to go and finish at Iowa State. The first two years that I spent there, I checked all of this out and I learned about the fish and wildlife program that was in place at the University. I found out that most all of the course work I had done up to that point was transferable so I decided to go that route instead. I had friends and other people that I was associated with that knew a little bit about that. Fish and Wildlife Management was sort of in its infancy back at that stage at the University level, even though there had been programs in place prior to World War II. They started in the 1930's. But it didn't really gain further momentum until after World War II.

MS. NORTON: Okay. Your first professional job was with the State, I believe you said?

DR. NELSON: Well, I worked part time for the Minnesota Department of Conservation when I was undergraduate and graduate school.

MS. NORTON: And then, when did you start with the federal?

DR. NELSON: I went to work for the Service in June of 1950 in South Dakota.

MS. NORTON: What did you think the pay and benefits were like at that time?

DR. NELSON: That's an interesting question because salaries weren't very great at that point. I remember when I had these job offers from the State of Minnesota and the Fish and Wildlife Service; I think the State job paid \$1,900.00 a year. And at that stage the starting federal salary at the GS-5 level, I believe was \$2,100.00! So even that made a difference. But the main reason I took the job with the Service was to get into the Wetland and Waterfowl arena. I knew about refuges, and I had been to places like Sand Lake when I was in school and that type of thing. At the same time when I took the job that I talked about earlier, there was also housing provided at the refuge, which was a big-ticket item for us at that stage. So all of those things led me to decide to join the Service.

MS. NORTON: Okay, so you started out in South Dakota. Where did you go from there?

DR. NELSON: Well, I spent two, almost three years working out at the Sand Lake Refuge in addition to the work that I did on the Waubay Study Area with Ken Black and Chuck Evans. I also got involved with people like Jerry Stout who as a Flyway representative at that time; a biologist at that time working out of Aberdeen. Also, people like Eb Sutton who was the Agent for that part of the country in Aberdeen at that time. They got me involved in a lot of the early banding programs at that time in the spring and again in the fall. Then we started some major goose banding operations at Sand Lake, which was kind of in its infancy at that point too. Herb Dill had come to Sand Lake as Manager from Missouri. And of course he was the infamous Herb Dill with the cannon-net trap.

MS. NORTON: I even remember him!

DR. NELSON: Howard Thornsby and all of those people were nearby too. So I had an opportunity to work with a lot of Service people at that stage who were well known and were interested in these types of things, the same as I was. While I was still at Sand Lake we had a visit in the late summer one year from Clarence Cottem. He was the Assistant Director at that point. I think Al Day was the Director then. Jerry Stout was supposed to take Cottem around on a tour of the eastern Dakotas. Something came up where he had to go somewhere else. So we arranged for me to take Cottem on this trip, which was quite an experience for a neophyte at that point. But Cottem was a real gentleman and a real professional and a real scientist. And I was interested in doing that because I figured I'd learn a lot from him. In the process, when we got back from that tour and I dropped him off at the Aberdeen airport, which wasn't much at that point, but he could get to Minneapolis from there; he said, "I been thinking. I want to see you and

your wife in Washington on the first of September. I am going to put you in the Departmental Training Program". I said, "Gee, I've got to think about that." And he said, "Well, not very long. You don't have much time to think about it!" It was only a few weeks away. I said, "Well, I at least see what my wife's response is". And he said, "Well, call me Monday", this was at the end of the week. So we wound up doing that. So I went from Sand Lake into one of those training programs early on. Of course that was a good experience. I got to meet a lot of front office people and key figures in the Service at that time. Then, I came back from there to Region 3 again. I went out and spent some time at the Lower Souris Refuge it was at that time; the J. Clark Salyer Refuge now. While this was going on, they arranged for me to go to Michigan to set up the Shiawassee Refuge. So Jean and I went to Michigan in 1954 and set up the Shiawassee Refuge.

MS. NORTON: Is that in the Upper Peninsula?

DR. NELSON: No, it's in the Saginaw Valley. The Refuge was originally proposed as part of a major flood control program in the Saginaw Valley with the Corps of Engineers and Michigan DNR. A lot of that never materialized, but we wound up setting up the refuge anyway. That was a good experience. And again, I had an opportunity to work with a lot of good people; both in the Service as well as with Michigan Department people. I often think about that because when we went to Saginaw, Michigan to set up that refuge, everything we had was in one little manila folder. That's how we did business back in those days! It was like; go find a place to live and an office downtown, and get the refuge established. So we were there until 1957. Then I came back to Minneapolis, to the Regional Office and worked as sort of a special assistant to Forest Carpenter, who was then the Deputy Assistant Regional Director for Refuges. Fran Gillette was still here then as the Refuge Supervisor, I should say. Fran was in the process of going to Atlanta as Regional Director. Then later, he went to Washington as Chief of Refuges. Of course I had known him from way back at the time I started. I started into that job; we lived a little farther north in Bloomington at 82nd and Washburn. That area is now the south town shopping center. We had a home built there. But in that process I got sent back to another training program in Washington for about a year or a year and a half. That was one of the senior level activities, which was another good experience. I had another scholarship for that. I finished that and came back to Region 3, but while I was in Washington in this program I did a lot of work in Research. Ed Carlson was Chief of Research at that time. But also from the Director's office, Ray Johnson was one of the Assistant Directors and he encouraged me to do that. So about the time I came back to the Regional office; this was getting up into the early 1960s, I ended up getting to do more research out of Washington and out of the Region. My role with Refuges kind of just got set aside. In that process, they then sent me to Jamestown, North Dakota to set up the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. We started that in 1963 and moved out there in 1965, after the initial set of buildings had been constructed and we were getting the staff up. So I spent roughly the next ten years in Jamestown organizing and setting

up the program at the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. I was the first Director of that. That was a real challenge and a good experience. Then, it must have been about 1974 I went back to Washington. Lynn Greenwalt was Director then. He talked me into coming back there to be the Assistant Director for Fish and Wildlife Resources. Marston had been in that job. I think he was leaving the Washington office to go to Denver to set up the new Region. Marston was the first Regional Director in Denver. He wasn't there very long before he, I think, retired. So I spent the next seven years as the Assistant Director for Fish and Wildlife Resources in Washington. That was a big program then because they had Fisheries and Wildlife combined. So we not only had the Refuge program, we had Law Enforcement, Animal Damage Control, Migratory Bird program, and the beginning of the old River Basins program, and the start of the Ecological Services program and other things that were going on. On the Fisheries side, there was the Fish Hatchery program as well as the Fishery Services program at that time. So that was one of the biggest elements of the Service at that stage. That was another real challenge. Of course, part of their concern was to make some changes in that complex program and make it work better. So I decided that first of all I needed some good help to do that. The first person that I brought in was Howard Larson. He came in as my Deputy of Fisheries. Then I looked around the landscape and was interested in finding some young enthusiastic guy in one of the Regions that came from a different part of the country where I had less experience, and that's how I got Jim Pulliam. He came in and worked as Deputy for Wildlife. Then in a short period of time; Larson was there for maybe two years and then he went to Boston. Then I brought in Galen Bouterbagh from Region 3. He came in to Washington as the Deputy. So that's how I got that program together, and got some really good people in there to help make it work. That essentially staid in place for a number of years until the organization as a whole changed and the eventually divided wildlife and fisheries as you may remember. Things were a little bit different, but I remember back in those days of course, the Chief of Law Enforcement was Clark Bavin. I had known Clark when he first came to work for the Service. He started at Crab Orchard as the "Recreational Law Enforcement Supervisor," or something! It's interesting how all of these people you meet early in your career, and those that did well moved up the line. I remember Jim Pulliam when he started working in the wetland program in South Dakota in the early 1950's. That's how he got started. Of course, then he went into Refuges and wound up at Lacacene [sounds like] and other places. I can't remember exactly where all he was in Region 4 but then he came in to Washington and worked in Refuge program. That's where he was when I got him. Galen I had known from Region 3. We had other people that we brought in to the Division. They were people that they knew. There are many ways to build an organization but you've got to have the right people and have some faith and trust in their capabilities to do it. So we came back to Minneapolis as Regional Director until 1987. I was in that job until 1987 when we had started the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. It was a new program that I had worked with early on from almost from its infancy in terms of developing the concept and working with the Canadians and the International Association and the Fish and Wildlife agencies in the fifty states, trying to put all of this together. We had a group between the Service and

the Canadian Wildlife Service to work on this. Then, we went through the final drafting process for the plan itself. There was a special drafting committee with people like Raleigh Sparrow and state folks and others came in and helped work on that. At the stage that was signed off on by the Department of the Interior and the State Department with Canada, it was ready for implementation. I was thinking about retiring in 1987 because I had plenty of years in, but Frank Dunkle has been the Director and John Turner had come in as the new Director during that period. They asked me if I would consider staying another five years and help implement the North American plan as the first Director. I agreed to do that. Initially, with the understanding that we could set up that phase out of Minneapolis since that's where I was located and that's where we lived. We did that for three years and hired the first North American Plan staff. We had an office here on the fifth floor in the Federal Building. That worked pretty good during the implementation stage, but when the Wetland Conservation Act was passed for funding, then we had to move the office back to Washington. So I had a good crew of people. Bob Streeter was my Deputy at that stage. Bob went back to Washington first and set up an office in the Arlington Square Building. We moved some of the staff that were willing to go there. A lot of them didn't want to move to Washington so we ended up essentially restaffing the whole program. I moved back there in 1991 because it had reached a point where we had to be there. I got that program on its feet and up and running. By 1992 it was up and going; a good solid program in both the U.S. and Canada, and Mexico was about to sign on. I went to the Director then and said, "Well, I served my five years. I think we've done what we set out to do and I am ready to retire." So I retired in January or February of 1992.

MS. NORTON: Who was the Regional Director in Region 3 before you, when you came?

DR. NELSON: Well, let's see, I've got to think who all was here. Jack Hemphill, I believe was the Regional Director. Jack went in to Washington, or where did he go?

MS. NORTON: No, I believe he lives down in Florida now.

DR. NELSON: I am trying to track him. He came up here from Region 4 and I think, I'm pretty sure about that. I replaced Hemphill when I came. Then of course Bob Brewell was here for many years and then retired. I think Brewell succeeded Dan Jansen, way back in the fifties.

MS. NORTON: He was a wonderful Regional Director too.

DR. NELSON: Yep. As a matter of fact Jansen has just become the Regional Director when I went to work.

MS. NORTON: In Region 3?

DR. NELSON: Yeah, in 1950! He had just replaced the person that they had. And at time the office was I think in downtown Minneapolis in the old Metropolitan Building. I remember going there and reporting there.

MS. NORTON: Not the one on Lake Street huh? The Buzzard building?

DR. NELSON: That came later!

MS. NORTON: Did you ever witness any new Service inventions or innovations?

DR. NELSON: Well thinking back, I really had a opportunity to participate in a lot of new program activities. I liked working with the people back in the 1950s when they initiated the Breeding Ground Banding program and they were still in the throes of implementing, revising and improving the Breeding Ground Survey program. That had all started right after the late 1940s and early 1950s. I had an opportunity to work with a lot of those folks. A lot of the early pilots; the Johnny Lynches of the world and the Ross Hansens and others that worked in that program or helped evolved that into it's present state. It was pretty crude when they started it. It was a pretty dangerous operation. But they were lucky, they did really well. So I had an opportunity to work in those kinds of program innovations over the years. Then, setting up a new refuge was to me a new experience although that's been done by a lot of people. I would say that the two biggest challenges that I experienced that were new program entities were setting up the Northern Prairie Research Center and later setting up the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and being the first Director.

MS. NORTON: So with the different moves from South Dakota to Washington, D.C. to Michigan and all over, how did this affect your family? How do you feel it affected your family?

DR. NELSON: Early on we didn't have any children, so it was easy for Jean and I to pick up and go. But then, when the children were young; starting in Michigan and moving back to the Twin Cities; from then on it was a little more difficult. Hopefully, you had a choice and were more selective in where you went. But as it turned out, it didn't really pose any problem to us like it has to many families, because our children were sort of young for the several years that we lived here in the Twin Cities. Then the ten years that we spent at the Research Center in North Dakota, they were well along in school in Jamestown. My boy Steve, he graduated from high school there. The girls were in junior high or high school when we moved back to Washington. They went to school in Virginia. Our daughter Beth graduated from Madison High School in Vienna, Virginia. The twins were in junior high so at the time we moved back here; they were able to go right up the street here to Jefferson High School here in Bloomington, Minnesota. So they graduated from there. From that standpoint we didn't have any real serious

problems. Contrary to the fact that I am aware that a lot of people just had a difficult time moving, and taking kids out of school mid-year and all of that.

MS. NORTON: Did you socialize with the people that you worked with for all of those years?

DR. NELSON: Well I certainly maintained what I would consider and professional and a personal relationship, probably more so with certain folks and certain families than others, depending on where we lived. Then I also got involved with a sort of fishing crew and a hunting crew that consisted of some of the same people. So to some degree the people that I socialized with, more so than Jean, was by choice because of the things they did were things that I was interested in. But I also attempted to maintain a good rapport with staff wherever I was on a personal and professional basis.

MS. NORTON: Did you work with any animals while you were on all of these jobs? Or was it just on paper and in your mind?

MS. NELSON: Well, I certainly worked with a lot of migratory birds, and a lot of waterfowl and a lot of other migratory birds species in the course of the years I was in the field and in research. But I was not like a deer biologist or a wolf biologist who spent years working with one species or small group of critters.

MS. NORTON: What support did you receive locally, regionally or federally in your positions with the Service?

DR. NELSON: Again, I think I was fortunate that I had a lot of good opportunities. And I had a lot of exposure and experience with state organizations; state game and fish people, and other state organizations like agricultural organizations. There were land management groups in many states. Of course throughout the Service, I had come up through the ranks and worked with practically all of the people at that stage who were managing these programs at various levels within the whole Fish and Wildlife Service. Generally, I had good support and relationships with both federal and state people, as well as people in other federal agencies.

MS. NORTON: How do you think the Service was perceived by people outside the agency?

DR. NELSON: The years that I spent in the Service, and right up until I retired; almost forty-two years, I think the Service was received well, particularly in the earlier years when the Service was in more of a leadership position in implementing new programs and had perhaps a great set of responsibilities that the agency does today. I think again, because of the kind of people, the individuals that were involved early on, they were well received both by other federal agencies and state agencies. I think that has changed a bit

in recent years. Even after I retired I could tell a difference. Organizationally, I think certain programs got the Service in trouble. The began to be a lot more state level and private concern over certain programs like endangered species regulations; the whole attempt to move into a ecosystem management program approach; a lot of that was not well received by the states or other participating organizations. Although some of the main stumbling blocks that were there, a lot of them have been corrected. Again, a lot of it gets back to people and who the administration and power and place, right down to the Secretary of the Interior and the Director in terms of the kinds of programs that their being asked to implement; and how much strength they have in defending their points of view on that.

MS. NORTON: What projects were you involved in? Every one we had, right?

DR. NELSON: Well, I probably covered a lot of those already in terms of the different programs that I worked in. Like in the years I spent in the Refuge System, if you want to call a refuge a project, I was at places like Sand Lake, Shiawassee, Lower Souris, and various assignments on the Upper Mississippi River when I was in the Regional office. Most of that activity was in the midwestern states.

MS. NORTON: Were there any major issues that you had to deal with?

DR. NELSON: We had a lot of them over the years. Some of the other kinds of programs and projects that I haven't talked about go back to the establishment of the early wetland protection programs. See, back in the early late 1940s and early 1950s drainage of wetlands, particularly in the prairie pothole region came to the forefront as a major conflict between wildlife and agriculture. That's what the Waubay Study area was all about. We were trying to learn more about the importance and relationship of wetlands and the landscape and what all species they were used by other than just ducks; and how they related to the water table and the ground water relationships and the whole hydrological aspect of that. So with the continuing conflict between drainage on one hand and wetland protection on the other it's basically an argument between the old Soil Conservation Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Of course, many of the same states were involved as well. The ultimate answer to that of course, was the resolution with Agriculture in determining the relative values of different types of wetlands, which they didn't know early on. So I had an opportunity to work with a lot of that; with the people directly involved in those programs. That led to setting up the program in the Service and starting in Region 3; which was the beginning of the Waterfowl Production Area program, which they started in Minnesota and North and South Dakota originally. I spent a lot of time working with that and to this day, it's still an ongoing program. We've overcome a lot of the hurdles but wetland drainage hasn't completely stopped. It's decline in magnitude, but it's still there.

MS. NORTON: Would you consider that your most pressing issue, the wetlands?

DR. NELSON: Well, the wetlands issue I think was an important one. The early years that I spent in the Regional office in Refuges, we had a lot of activity going on with the management of the locks and dams on the Mississippi River, particularly the upper Mississippi River. I spent a lot of my time working with that program with the Corps of Engineers and other related organizations and states trying to resolve the conflicts between how backwater areas are managed on the river through the lock and dam system. There was a lot of progress made there leading to and including some new innovative programs that the Corps implemented to help support rather than hinder habitat protection.

MS. NORTON: Were there any major impediments to your job, or to your career?

DR. NELSON: No, not really, unless I made some myself. You know, I am thinking back, and another thing that I had an opportunity to work with was the later years that I spent in the Washington office as Assistant Director. We sort of revamped the whole migratory bird regulation setting process. You may recall all of the things that went on during those years. But that was another new approach to trying to simplify regulations and still maintain proper state level involvement. So we had to set up a new set of procedures to deal with that. Much of that is still in place today; like the Service Regulations Committee and that type of thing. Then of course early on in my career I also had an opportunity to work with the initial formation of the Flyway Councils. They had just come on line in the early 1950s at about the time I started work. As a matter of fact, I went to one of the early formation meetings of the Mississippi Flyway Council right here in St. Paul. Again, that was an attempt to provide Service leadership, but increase state responsibility and state leadership in the whole management of migratory birds. There was a lot of unknowns at that stage as to how well it would work, if in fact it would really work. Then at some stage, once it would presumably work in the U.S., we had do somewhat the same in Canada to bring the Canadian provinces and agencies into the whole regulation setting process. So that was another event that was going on during my early career that I had the opportunity to work with a lot of that. I think back, even now, I spent a lot of days and a lot of hours with guys like John Rogers who was head of the Migratory Bird office, after it had been established. That didn't exist until later years when Walt Crecy and Al Geise set up the first set up the first Migratory Bird office. And we worked with people like Jim Patterson in the Canadian Wildlife Service. He was the Director of the Migratory Bird Research office at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan at the same time we set up the Northern Prairie Center. So I had worked with him early on in research programs; together with guys like Al Hokebaum down at the waterfowl station and whatnot. Then over time of course, as we got in to these more coordinated cooperative programs with the Canadian Wildlife Service; people like Patterson and others that we had worked with early on were in positions to try to help make those things work. So again, I guess that's a matter of being in the right place at the right time. It was sort of fortuitous, but it just tells you that the right people and good people can

make things work. So those weren't really obstacles, but they were major hurdles that had to be overcome internationally to put the current programs in place. They are programs that are still working effectively today.

MS. NORTON: When you started out in South Dakota, who was your Supervisor?

DR. NELSON: I sort of had two Supervisors when I first went to work. They sent me to Sand Lake Refuge and Claire Rawlings was the Refuge Manager at that time. So he was my onsite Supervisor. Then, when I worked on the Waubay Study Area program I worked under Ken Black who was in charge of that program with Chuck Evans. But that was all by mutual agreement.

MS. NORTON: And you've probably been referring to your other Supervisors as you've been talking.

DR. NELSON: And then, after about the first two years at Sand Lake Claire Rawlings moved into the Regional office as the Refuge Division, Farm Program Supervisor, or agricultural representative, or whatever. Herb Dill moved up to Sand Lake from Swan Lake Refuge in Missouri. So I worked with Herb for about a year. From that point on, when I went to Shiawassee, Forrest Carpenter and Fran Gillette were my Supervisors. And in the later years that I spent in Refuges, Carpenter was of course.

MS. NORTON: Then, you became Supervisor. Well, you did Harvey!

DR. NELSON: Sort of, yeah, and then I suppose on all of the tours of duty that I spent in Washington and back in the Region, the current Director was my Supervisor.

MS. NORTON: All of these individuals that you are talking about they are probably the ones that helped shape your career to help you become what you did?

DR. NELSON: Or sure, no question!

MS. NORTON: Who are some people that you knew outside of the Service, would they be able to work for the Service today? You must have met many, many people who didn't work for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

DR. NELSON: Man, I could give you a list pages long I suppose but I think back on people outside the Service that had a strong influence on my career...well early obviously some of those people were in the Minnesota Department of Conservation. I worked there part time. John Moile who was an old aquatic research specialist. Ed Carlson was in the beginning of the PR Program at that time in Minnesota before he went with the Service. And I worked with other guys like Forrest Lee who was later on the waterfowl biologist for Minnesota. He later came to work for us at Northern Prairie. There were a

lot of Minnesota folks that I had a lot of respect for. Probably one of the real mentors that I had when I was still in school was Dick Dore. Richard Dore. Dick was a real character. He was a Forester from Pennsylvania and graduated from West Point. He was a military man up to a certain degree. But he came to Minnesota to work in their Forestry Program. Then he came in to St. Paul to set up the Pittman-Robinson Federal Aide Program when it first started, or as it got organized better. So that's why he was around during the 1947-48-49 period. Then Dick became very interested in the role of wetlands, so he was the father of the Minnesota Save the Wetlands Campaign. The reason I got so well acquainted with him was that I worked part time for him when I was the Minnesota Department. And he started this Save the Wetlands Campaign so all of a sudden he was driving around all over the state conducting meetings, trying to drum up support for that program. He found out that Jean and I lived about two blocks away from him in south Minneapolis so he started taking me along on those trips, which was good. I mean, I learned a lot from him; but I found out the reason he took me along on the trips was that I could drive. So all of the way up, wherever we were going, it was always a last minute deal. He'd come in and say, "Well, it's three o'clock in the afternoon, we've got to be in Three River Falls by seven." Well, that's impossible. So he'd practice his speech all the way up, and sleep all of the way home. He was a great promoter. He had a profound interest and feeling for being sure that the public understood what's going on. He'd tell me, "If you don't have them with you, you aren't going to get anywhere." It's kind of funny, I remember that after going to about four or five meetings with him like that, on the way home one night, I had heard him give the same speech over and over again; he said, "Well young fellow, how do you think that went?" I said, "Well, as usual Dick, it went well. But I want to ask you one question. I have been to four or five of these now and you've never used the same figures twice. Isn't that going to get you in trouble?" He said, "Young fellow, don't worry about figures. It's the message that counts." I never forgot that. So he was an important figure early on in my career. People like Dr. Bill Marshall who was the head of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at that stage. Lloyd Smith was a Fisheries Professor; those guys sort of shaped all of us.

MS. NORTON: Do you remember who was President when you started working for the Service? And the Secretaries of the Interior?

DR. NELSON: In 1950? I'd have to go look. I remember a lot of Secretaries and all of the Presidents. Eisenhower of course, was President early on when I was in Washington. I'd have to look at a list.

MS. NORTON: How did you feel about changes in administrations? Do you feel that they affected our work; Democrats versus Republicans or vice versa?

DR. NELSON: It's my opinion today, and it's probably changed over the years; earlier on I always felt that the Democratic administrations were stronger supporters of natural resource programs in general. But then, over time, they also became strong supporters of

farm programs in a lot of the conflicts. So you begin to not have that strong of a relationship. Then, in some Republican administrations, they literally came to grips with some of these conflicts and showed some improvements. So I have always tended to be non-partisan in that sense. I have supported Democrats and I have supported Republicans; depending upon the administration and the issue and how things have gone. But by and large, I think any administration has had a profound influence on Service programs; first of all in who they appointed as Secretary and Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. And how well those people understood or supported the Service's mission and how well they were able to support or get appropriate budgets to support the program. So that's always the relationship that I have looked at. And it's been good and bad under both parties.

MS. NORTON: In your opinion, who were the individuals that shaped the Service? We've probably already mentioned a lot of these people.

DR. NELSON: I am trying to think way back to when the Bureau of Biological Survey became the Fish and Wildlife Service. That's sort of the point at which key people were needed for it to become the Fish and Wildlife Service. That took some time and the World War II years didn't help that too much either. I think that if you start at the time after World War II...Al Day was the Director when I came on board. The first Directors of the Wildlife Management Institute was the former, one of the first Service Directors. I've got to think of his name. But anyway, sort of at that stage; those were some of the key people. Ding Darling of course, early on was instrumental in convincing President Roosevelt at that stage, of the need for the Refuge System and the need for more attention to migratory birds. But that still was done under the Bureau of Biological Survey. It was in these transition years that these other people came forward. And from my experience guys like Al Day, who was a strong, good administrator; a strong supporter of both migratory bird programs and the fisheries interests. He was largely a fisheries man. Perhaps one of the strongest migratory bird people and refuge supporters we had early one was Clarence Clottem when he was Assistant Director of the Service. And of course, J. Clark Salyer who was really the father of the Refuge System. Those guys were all there in the first years that I had any Washington exposure.

MS. NORTON: What was the high point of your career?

DR. NELSON: Gee, I've had so many, it's hard to sort them out and pick any one. I would say that the two major challenges and most satisfaction I got out of positions that I was in was setting up the Northern Prairie Research Center and seeing that function; and secondly helping set up the North American Waterfowl Plan and putting that into operation. I would probably have to say that I got more satisfaction from seeing the North American plan up and running, because we had so many concerns and doubts about how all of that was going to come together and it finally did. So that was a real highlight

in my career. And I got numerous recognitions and whatnot for a lot of that. Those were good events. Some of them are still happening.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever have a low point in your career?

DR. NELSON: I can't recall that I ever did. I might have been frustrated or disgusted about things not happening fast enough. But I approached every assignment that I had as a new challenge and one that I could handle; and one that I could show major accomplishments by undertaking it.

MS. NORTON: What was the most dangerous or frightening experience you ever had while you were working for the Service?

DR. NELSON: I believe that would go back to some of my early experiences in the aerial survey programs; flying with guys like Johnny Lynch and later with Ross Hansen and even later with Art Brasden and some of the present day characters. Landing on some of the little Canadian airstrips, or if there was no airstrip, landing on gravel highways; sometimes because you had to. And you could run out of gas, or something went wrong but they were just darn lucky that they never had any serious accidents.

MS. NORTON: What do you consider to be the most humorous experience you had while you were working? There was probably one every week!

DR. NELSON: Oh boy. I think some of the socializing and camaraderie that we had at Director's meetings over the years. By the time I became a Regional Director and Assistant Director, I participated in a lot of Directorate meetings with a lot of good people. I think at those sessions there was reminiscing about who did things best, or who wasn't worth a damn if they felt like saying that. At least I remember those events as being fairly humorous as well as being fairly important professionally. We talked about other jobs, or assignments that I had. I talked about the biggest challenges and where I got the most satisfaction. But the job that I had as Regional Director, I always felt that provided an opportunity to see things happen more continuously, rather than in some of those other special programs where there was like an almost single event setting up a program or facility, or whatever; getting things underway. What I liked about the Regional Director job that's different from all of the others was again, with good staff people, all the variety of programs that you had. And if everything worked right you'd see a lot of progress and you'd be able to experience the results from that. Sometimes rather immediately in terms of public satisfaction or your own personal satisfaction or the resource benefits. It was a little different.

MS. NORTON: What were some of the changes that you observed in the Service, in the personnel and in the environment?

DR. NELSON: I have thought a lot about that over the years. At the time I went to work in 1950 things were still pretty simple organizationally. The Regions were in place. There were not as many regions as there are today. The Regional Directors spent more time together back in those years than I believe they do today, even though they have their meetings and all of that type of thing. I think there was a stronger both professional and personal relationship between the key administrators; number one because there were fewer of them. On one hand, they were all sort of dealing with the same sets of problems. And the budget process was much simpler than what it is today. I think all of that made for more of a family type organization. People knew each other and talked to and respected each other on a first name, job basis. That carried right down to the project leaders from the Regional Supervisors to Refuge Managers to Enforcement Supervisors to the Agents. It was a little different in Research. I found after I got into that because they had always been a little farther removed from their Supervisors scattered all around the country, working on specific things. Eventually, that has sort of been brought back together as more of a team approach. That's one thing we started at Northern Prairie. So that certainly was different. There was a very strong emphasis in the Fisheries program at the time I came to work in the Service that sort of became diluted down the road. The Hatchery program, as you well know, a lot of it was disbursed of and given to the states and other organizations to operate. Right or wrong, some of it still prevails for Endangered Species, Anadromous (?) fish and that type of thing. I think there are two things that have happened in my opinion; the organization grew considerable and the organizational structure changed so it was more of a, should I say, formal approach to how you did business. The Director no longer picks up the telephone usually, and calls somebody in the field, some project leader, or even a Regional Director unless it something that can't be done by somebody else. So that's different. Then, the States became stronger and were able to exercise more authority. They became better funded under the expanding Federal Aide Programs and whatnot. It was almost to the point that that is when some of the conflicts started to develop; state and federal responsibility. But on the other hand, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies was put in place years ago and one of their continuing roles is to maintain that balance and relationship. I have worked with those groups and committees over the years and see that happen. As any organization gets larger it becomes more formal, and it becomes less personal. And almost to the point that I am not sure people make an effort to get to know each other like we used to. They don't have the same opportunities to work together like we used to. That's what I've seen in my years.

MS. NORTON: Where do you see the Service heading in the next decade?

DR. NELSON: I have heard a lot of people talk about that in recent years and probably ask that very same question. It seems to me, in maybe just the last five years or so, and in spite of all of these other changes, there has been more of a transition to broader program areas. Even the National Wildlife Refuge System takes on a different form, a different nature in terms of trying to have a broader based biological, ecological,

biodiversity influenced program. There's nothing wrong with that, it's a matter of how do they comply with the Service's basic responsibilities. I keep going back to; what are the Services primary responsibilities? What were they fifty years ago? What are they today? And I don't see a whole lot of changes out there other than the changes that they made in the Fisheries program, which I think were understood. The states are doing a good job with that. But basically we've got the NWR, the Migratory Bird Program, the federal Enforcement Program and we've got the Animal Damage Control activities, which went to Agriculture. Whether that stays there, it probably will. And then of course, we had the Research arm, which we've lost but hopefully will come back. I don't see how the Service could continue to function as is should without it's own research arm. I have never agreed with the transfer that was made. A lot of other people haven't either, and maybe if we could change administration or have a change in leadership, I am optimistic that could get some recognition again. So some of the new responsibilities that the Service has been given, or has assumed like Endangered Species; it's an important program providing that it's handled right and managed without a lot of the conflict that they seem to generate. Some parts of the country are better at generating conflict than others. Some can handle it. Of course there have been so many changes in the Ecological Services, the old River Basins programs; those folks are still performing the same kinds of functions that they were, it's just that the environmental review processes have changed and become more complicated and there is more conflict developing over it. The Service has all of those basic responsibilities and it seems to me that they need to design a path that takes them right down that line to fulfill those basic responsibilities and not deviate from it too much. Sure, they are going to be influenced by the administrations, by budgets, by public concern over big issues, or small issues; but they should be able to deal with that without a lot of conflict, I think. And that gets back to number one; leadership. They've got to have top-level leadership in the Directorate. And they also have to have an Assistant Secretary and Secretary that they can work through to be able to work with the administration. If there is a glitch in any part of that, then things start to fall apart. That's what I think has happened in fairly recent years. Hopefully we'll get back on track here. I think the deviation or departure that occurred in support of hunting and fishing in general got the Service in a lot of hot water, with a lot of new emphasis on biodiversity and ecosystem management and all of the new terminology; conservation biology. There is nothing wrong with the concept, it's just that they've got their place and they should be fitted in to the ongoing, broader scaled programs that the Service has, and not used as a new tool for generating more dollars and people, which is what originally people tried to do. I am optimistic. And I think that the Service, with the right leadership can develop a pathway that puts them right back to their original areas of responsibility, recognizing that some new things have been added.

MS. NORTON: Well, we're just about done with this interview Harvey, but you've been doing a great job! If you have any photographs or documents that you want to donate or share with the Archives, if you'd let me know; I can get them Xeroxed or whatever needs to be done, okay? Who else do you think we should interview? We have

a lot of them right here around the Twin Cities, and I am going to try and get to as many of them as I can. I know that John Ellis will be one of your suggestions.

DR. NELSON: I should bring you up to Eagle Lake in May to fish camp and you could interview all of them!

MS. NORTON: Oh really? Where is Eagle Lake?

DR. NELSON: In Ontario. That's where our fishing group goes.

MS. NORTON: My travel authorization says, "U.S. and foreign".

DR. NELSON: Seriously, I don't know what they've done with guys like Pulliam and Steglist, and Galen.

MS. NORTON: What I have done Harvey is that I have taken the list of retirees that we're working with. And I have made a map for every state and I am writing in every state, where there are people. So I am always going to do eight or ten on any trip that I go on. It isn't anything to do with money, who cares! I'd gladly do this and a volunteer, and I am doing it as a volunteer! But I am getting reimbursed a bit. I am going to try to get Harold Benson as soon as I can. I am going to try to get Art Hawkins. Although Art has been interviewed once, too, by this Tom Wole.

DR. NELSON: I don't know, maybe it was a few years back one of the people was out to the Region 3 Christmas party. They talked about doing this. This was before they started the interviews, I think.

MS. NORTON: Right, we just started them.

DR. NELSON: That was two or three years ago, at least.

MR. NORTON: Yes, because Spearfish was the third reunion? The fourth one is next year down in Florida. I want to thank you so much Harvey for your time.